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ABSTRACT

Learning phonics can be enjoyable or it can be tedious. This paper presents several teaching approaches that can guide pupils to like phonics instruction and to become better readers. Guidelines to remember in teaching phonics are to: (1) make it a relaxed and informal learning activity; (2) decrease competition among learners while developing each pupil's self-concept; (3) make phonics an inherent part of reading and literature lessons; and (4) emphasize constructivism as a psychology of learning. (CR)

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PHONICS CAN BE FUN!

Phonics can be enjoyable or it can be tedious as learning opportunities. I have supervised student teachers and cooperating teachers in the public schools for thirty years. Many of the teachers I supervised devised ways of assisting pupils in phonics through games and fun activities. How can this be done? I will describe several teachers' approaches in guiding pupils to like phonics instruction and in the end become better readers.

Phonics as Pleasure

That is a funny heading when we think of pupils who are drilled and drilled on mastering specific phonics learnings in traditional classrooms (Ediger, 1995). Let us take a look at actual lessons taught informally on phonics whereby positive pupil attitudes were prevalent toward the concept of "phonics."

Ms.Smith stressed holistic procedures in teaching reading. After the reading activity, she had pupils select two words from the completed reading experience. Learners worked collaboratively in groups of four. Group one chose the words "main" and "road" Pupils in this committee were to locate from the lesson other words that started like "main." These were– more, mad, man, matter, and many. Next, pupils were to choose words that ended with the same ending as :""road." The following came from the story read: do, done, daily, dugout, doughnut, dig, doll, and don't. In sequence, learners were to brainstorm words that begin like "main" and end like "road." Pupils were challenged by the learning activity. One pupil was skeptical about being able to think of words that would fit the category. But, all four pupils were eager beavers in wanting to locate and record many words. As time went on, the committee of four wrote the following words: mad, maid, mud, mind, mild, milled, minced, meek, mold, and mined. Involved learners remarked how they really had to think with words that begin like "main" and end like "road."

Next, pupils wanted to write a poem containing some of the "main-

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road" categories of words, listed above. A quatrain was decided upon for the written poem. The following poem resulted:

The maid walked in the mud
Her meek mind milled in the mold
A mad cow minced with her mild cud
Along came a farmer who grabbed her cold.

There was one word from the set that pupils could not use in the poem and that was "mined." One pupil indicated that, "This is fun, but you sure have to think."

In a second school, Ms. Jones chose a phonics sequence after a few pupils revealed they had problems with identifying words that ended in a silent "e" letter. She handed to each of these pupils a blank sheet wherein learners were to write words ending in silent "e." The sky would be the limit in terms of number of words written. Pupils in the committee wrote down words they knew ending in silent "e." At home, each pupil got parents involved in the word hunt. Pupils also browsed through a dictionary for locating silent "e" ending words. Altogether, committee members found fifty-one words. The excitement is high and the desire to learn is great in these kinds of learning opportunities. Did this activity assist pupils to identify more words with the silent "e" ending? Both the student teacher and the cooperating teacher through observation believed that pupils identified more words in reading with the silent "e" ending than formerly was the case. Then too, teachers felt that pupils pay attention more carefully to word analysis with learning activities such as looking for words ending in silent "e." Motivation to achieve is high here. In fact, this same committee asked for an activity in using these same words in free verse. They had been writing free verse the preceding week. Learners tend to want to make use of what had been learned.

Mr. Albert asked his class what they noticed about a set of seventeen words he had printed neatly on the chalkboard. Pupils

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presented numerous hypotheses when looking for a pattern. The following were ruled out:

1. the words did not start with the same letter.
2. the words did not end alike.
3. the words did not possess either a short or a long vowel sound.
4. the words did not contain a pattern of silent letters.
5. the words did not contain a pattern of rarely used words.

If all of these are ruled out, what is left? One pupil caught the pattern. The words had a consistent sound such as in bl(ue), t(wo), t(oo), t(o), r(heu)metism, and sh(oe). A parenthesis has been placed around the letters, spelled differently, for the same sound.

There is much interest, excitement, and motivation in these kinds of learning opportunities. Pupils desired another activity which had the same interest and purpose factors. One pupil remarked that she would be on the lookout more so, than formerly, for words that are spelled differently but have the same sound. Phonics can be taught in a way that stresses enjoyment and pleasure.

Mrs. Pink guided first grade pupils to make discoveries in phonic elements from completed experience charts. She asked pupils to find words on the chart that rhymed. Having studied rhyming words previously, a pupil responded with "cat" and "hat." A toy cat and a hat were at the drama center; pupils received their ideas for the experience chart from objects located in the classroom. Using these two words, the class was asked to provide two lines of verse with ending words rhyming.

The following poem resulted:

I saw a cat
who sat on a hat.

In sequence, the teacher asked for two additional words that had rhyme contained in the experience chart. A pupil responded with "fan" and "pan." One pupil volunteered to present a poem of two lines with ending words rhyming. The following couplet was then written:

In the closet, I found a fan
Next to it was a large pan.

Pupils love words which rhyme and enjoy the act of composing. The subject matter for the experience chart comes from pupils. Locating specific words in the chart is done by learners. Composing poetry is also a process and product completed by pupils. Pupils become increasingly sophisticated in hearing likenesses and differences in sounds when phonics becomes an enjoyable activity.

In her classroom, Ms. Johnston believes strongly in having pupils play games in learning phonic elements. In one activity, she had pupils locate objects in the room which began with certain sounds. The first object wanted emphasized a "b" sound such as in "bat." Several pupils indicated the word "ball." There were four balls in the classroom. Next, Ms. Johnston asked for words that began with the "m" sound such as "mop." While looking around in the classroom, pupils came up with the following when pointing to each object: maps, magic marker, mathematics book, money, microphone, Macintosh, milo (a farm grain in a dish), music book, and mush (a feed for fish in the aquarium). A third object held up by the teacher for pupils to see was "toy." Here pupils looked for words that began with the "t" sound. Thus in the toy box and in the classroom were the following: top, table, tacks, a tap, and Tums (on the teacher's desk).

The above activity becomes a noncompetitive game played individually or collaboratively. The desire to play games when identifying phonic elements is intrinsically interesting. In these activities, pupils do become more sensitive to hearing sounds when identifying words in beginning reading.

During a conference with a fifth grade pupil after the latter had read a library book during individualized reading, Mr. Braun asked the pupil what she noticed about the words on a page in the library book after reading it orally. The pupil thought for a long time. Finally, she answered that many words do not follow a consistent sound/symbol relationship. The question had been very openended and the teacher

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wondered what kind of an answer he would receive. The pupil was then asked to point out which words do not have a rather consistent grapheme/phoneme relationship. The pupil identified the following, among others: phone, thorough, and two. A discussion followed in which the pupil volunteered to do a brief report on the history of spelling English words to notice attempts made at change to make for consistency between symbol and sound.

Mr. Milford, a sixth grade teacher, worked with a committee of five pupils to notice words which were spelled rather consistently between symbol and sound. The words came from four pages of a story being studied in the basal reader. These pupils tended to overlook consistency in phonetic elements when reading. Words located by the committee included the following: apricot, can, worker, soft, most, delicatessen, room, and lumber. A discussion followed whereby the previous words were analyzed more thoroughly in terms of consistency. The second word "can" was probably spelled the most consistently of any word listed. The other words had degrees of consistency between symbol and sound such as the word "worker" having having two letters which are governed by the "r" letter and sound. the word "most" has a long vowel sound in the "o" letter; otherwise the graphemes and phonemes are consistent. These pupils needed more practice in studying symbols and their related sounds to notice relationship or lack thereof.
A learning by discovery approach was wanted by these pupils in studying phonics (Ediger, 1997)..

In Conclusion

In this writing, I have presented different lessons on phonics taught by student teachers and cooperating teachers whom I supervised in the public schools. These teachers believed that phonics instruction should be enjoyable and fun. There is no need to have phonics be dull and boring.

I believe pupils found the activities to be interesting as well as worthwhile. Learners seemed to improve in reading instruction as a result of having been engaged phonics games and informal learning.

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The learning opportunities were not structured in terms of using a tightly presented program of phonics.

I recommend the following pertaining to the teaching of phonics:

1. make it a relaxed learning opportunity with all pupils being actively involved in the informal lesson.

2. decrease competition among learners while developing the self concept of each pupil.

3. have the phonics activities be an inherent part of the reading and literature lesson.

4. emphasize constructivism as a psychology of learning in that the learning activities in phonics pertain to the ongoing lesson and unit of study.

5. good attitudes toward reading and the language arts should be an end result of informal methods in teaching phonics (Ediger,1996).

Selected References

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